UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.3/1994/2
29 November 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

STATISTICAL COMMISSION
Special session
11-15 April 1994
Items 3, 4, 6 and 7 of the
provisional agenda*

STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL COOPERATION

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 1993 SYSTEM OF NATIONAL ACCOUNTS (1993 SNA)

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS

COORDINATION AND INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL PROGRAMMES

Report of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination on its sixteenth session

SUMMARY

At its sixteenth session (Geneva, 13-16 September 1993), the Working Group made recommendations to the Task Force on National Accounts concerning immediate priorities for implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts (paras. 4-8); reviewed the work of the six inter-agency task forces and set a number of parameters for their work (paras. 9-12), and recommended to the Statistical Commission the establishment of two new task forces (paras. 13-17).

It reviewed progress achieved in relation to the Statistical Commission's 19 recommendations and decisions on strengthening international statistical cooperation and development (paras. 18-24 and 68) - in particular, it considered that the mandate of the regional commissions in respect of their statistical activities should be specified in operational terms to enable them to play an appropriate role in strengthening international statistical coordination (para. 18); decided there was a need for wider dissemination of its report, particularly to regional statistical conferences (para. 19); made

* E/CN.3/1994/1.

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decisions on its own functioning, agenda and documentation (paras. 20 and 21) and on new documentation for the Statistical Commission on plans for methodological development in statistics (paras. 22-24).

The Working Group also recommended to the Statistical Commission the adoption of the fundamental principles of official statistics that had been previously adopted by the Economic Commission for Europe (paras. 25-29); made recommendations for improving the inventory of statistical data collection activities and for expanding the use of the inventory for coordinating statistical data collection and reducing the reporting burden on countries (paras. 30-34); and reviewed and finalized the provisional agenda for the special session of the Statistical Commission in 1994 and the twenty-eighth session in 1995 (subject to further review by the Commission) and made decisions concerning the documentation for both sessions (paras. 36-67).

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INTRODUCTION

1. The sixteenth session of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination of the Statistical Commission was held at Geneva from 13 to 16 September 1993. The agenda, as adopted, is contained in annex I to the present report.

2. Following the practice at the fifteenth session of the Working Group and in accordance with the decision of the Statistical Commission, the officers elected at the twenty-seventh session of the Commission who attended the Working Group meeting served as its officers, W. Begeer (Netherlands), Chairman of the Statistical Commission, serving as Chairman of the session. 1/ Other members present were H. E. Montero (Argentina), H. G. Merk (Germany), R. Thamarajakshi (India), V. James (Jamaica), J. Olenski (Poland) and K. Wallman (United States of America). At the invitation of the Chairman, the following observers were present: S. A. Minciotti (Brazil), B. Prigly (Canada), J. L. Bodin (France), K. Hirayama (Japan) and E. Ordaz (Mexico).

3. The following were represented: Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat (UNSTAT), Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), International Labour Organization (ILO), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), World Health Organization (WHO), World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), Customs Cooperation Council (CCC), European Economic Community (EEC), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Statistical Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and International Statistical Institute.

I. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 1993 SYSTEM OF NATIONAL ACCOUNTS (1993 SNA) AND PLANS FOR FURTHER ESSENTIAL RESEARCH

4. The Working Group considered the matter on the basis of a report of the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts (ISWGNA) (E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.4) on revision and completion of the 1993 SNA for publication and the role and work programme of ISWGNA and a note by the Secretariat (E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.2/Add.1) containing an outline of a report for the special session of the Statistical Commission in 1994 on strategies, progress and problems in the implementation of the 1993 SNA, prepared by ISWGNA. It also had before it a summary of the results of the twenty-seventh session of the Subcommittee on Statistical Activities of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), held at Geneva from 6 to 8 September 1993.

5. The Working Group agreed that ISWGNA had been very successful in coordinating the work of agencies and countries on the 1993 SNA, that its immediate priority was the completion of the 1993 SNA publication and that it had a number of additional substantive tasks that were of high priority. Those tasks included: (a) the design and implementation of a revised SNA questionnaire that would be harmonized to meet the different data needs of the members of ISWGNA and others, including national offices; (b) the further development of handbooks, compilation guides, training materials and training

seminars to help implementation; and (c) continuing the research agenda and developing proposals for further updating the international standards on national accounts and related statistics.

6. The Working Group noted with concern that ISWGNA had not developed a coordinated implementation strategy, including a major role for the regional commissions. The Working Group agreed that the needs of various groups of countries for assistance in implementation varied, in part in relation to their previous experience with national accounts, and was of the view that countries with experience with problems, solutions and priority setting for implementation should share that experience with other countries through the exchange of technical reports, seminars, workshops, other training activities and bilateral assistance projects. The Working Group welcomed continuing offers of assistance from a number of countries and international organizations for implementation at the country level, but cautioned against duplication of efforts. It decided that, in practical terms, support should also be given for the basic data that are needed for developing national accounts. The Working Group stressed that a coordinated implementation strategy should be developed as soon as possible by ISWGNA, as had been recommended by the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities at its twenty-seventh session (E/CN.3/1994/4, para. 24 (a)), and that the strategy should involve substantial interaction between countries and the regional commissions.

7. The Working Group also stressed that ISWGNA should take the necessary action as soon as possible to identify and mobilize the resources necessary for implementation of the 1993 SNA, as had been requested by the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities at its twenty-seventh session (E/CN.3/1994/4, para. 24 (a)).

8. The Working Group welcomed the planned revisions of other related systems of statistics (balance-of-payments, money and banking, and government finance statistics) that would bring them into full harmonization with the 1993 SNA.

II. WORK OF THE INTER-AGENCY TASK FORCES ESTABLISHED BY THE WORKING GROUP

9. The Working Group considered the matter on the basis of progress reports from the conveners of each of the task forces as follows: National accounts (Convener: ISWGNA) (E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.4); industrial and construction statistics (Convener: OECD), international trade statistics (Convener: GATT), price statistics including the International Comparison Programme (Convener: EUROSTAT), environment statistics (Convener: UNSTAT) (E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.8); and finance statistics (Convener: IMF) (E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.8/Add.1). Supplementary notes prepared by the conveners were available on industrial and construction statistics, international trade statistics, price statistics and the International Comparison Programme, and environment statistics. EUROSTAT provided an information note entitled "INTRASTAT - Intra-community trade after 1992". The Working Group also had before it a summary of the results of the twenty-seventh session of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities.

10. The Working Group expressed its satisfaction with the work of the task forces, noting that, as expected, each was at a different stage of development. It restated its position (E/CN.3/1993/21, para. 54) that countries which are

willing to contribute to task force activities were welcome to participate, and noted the rationale that the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities had adopted for the participation of countries (E/CN.3/1994/4, para. 21 (c)). It was considered important to include input from developing countries as well. The Working Group stressed the importance of including the work of the regional commissions that came within the scope of the task forces.

11. The Working Group noted that a common goal of the task forces was to improve the international comparability of statistics in the selected sectoral fields; such improvement required taking into account and resolving the differing situations in countries. The Working Group recognized that the task forces, in order to be successful, required the assignment of resources by the participating organizations. The Working Group requested the task forces to (a) clarify how they perceived their mandate, (b) evaluate their methods, achievements to date and prospects for future success and (c) report briefly to the Statistical Commission at its special session in 1994 on the basis of their reviews.

12. In respect of the individual task forces the Working Group expressed views and took the following action:

(a) National accounts

The views of the Working Group are set out in paragraphs 4-8 above;

(b) Industrial and construction statistics

The Working Group:

(i) Noted that the Task Force had limited itself to industrial statistics;

(ii) Noted that three countries had volunteered their services and participated in the Task Force;

(c) International trade

The Working Group:

(i) Noted that the Task Force had been set up earlier, and had moved forward quickly and successfully;

(ii) Welcomed the priority-setting approach by which activities were identified as short-term, medium-term and long-term;

(d) Price statistics including ICP

The Working Group:

(i) Requested the Task Force, at its meeting planned for October 1993, to clarify its mandate and establish a clear plan of action;

(ii) Reconfirmed its view that, because of the relationship between ICP and general price statistics, the importance of integrating ICP into national ongoing price statistics programmes, and the common core of

organizations involved in general prices work and ICP, the task force should include ICP within the scope of its work;

(e) Environment statistics

The Working Group:

(i) Considered that the work of the Task Force should be kept in step with the work on national accounts, especially on environmental accounting;

(ii) Considered that setting priorities among the tasks to be carried out was especially important and that that process should take into account the experience of the Task Force on International Trade Statistics in establishing long-term, medium-term and short-term priorities;

(f) Finance statistics

The Working Group expressed satisfaction with the work of the Task Force.

13. With respect to the possible establishment of new task forces, the Working Group welcomed the consideration given the matter by the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities at its twenty-seventh session (E/CN.3/1994/4, para. 25).

14. The Working Group recognized the importance of the growing services sector in many economies and the need for development and coordination of statistics in that sector. It also noted the work of the Voorburg Group on Services. The Working Group confirmed the establishment of a task force on service statistics, focusing on international trade in services in the first instance, on the understanding that the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities would find a convener. The Working Group considered that the task force should draw upon the work of the Voorburg Group on Services as necessary.

15. The Working Group also confirmed the establishment of a task force on the measurement of poverty, reflecting the need for expanded coordination work in this field, which had been set as a priority area by many organizations. It expressed its appreciation of the willingness of the World Bank to act as convener and requested the World Bank to associate the regional commissions with the work, as considerable developmental and measurement work was proceeding at the regional level.

16. The Working Group recognized that there was a continuing need to improve coordination of technical cooperation activities. However, it supported the view of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities (E/CN.3/1994/4, para. 26 (c)) that it was not timely to establish a task force on the matter, given the amount of work already required of organizations by the existing task forces. In order to start addressing the issues, however, it requested the existing task forces to consider technical cooperation in each of their areas.

17. The Working Group decided to recommend to the Statistical Commission that it endorse the establishment of the two new task forces mentioned in paragraphs 14 and 15 above.

III. METHODS OF WORK OF THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION AND ITS WORKING GROUP

18. The Working Group, in following up on recommendation 10 of the Statistical Commission at its twenty-seventh session on strengthening the role of the regional commissions, 2/ considered that the mandate of the regional commissions, in respect of their statistical activities, should be specified in operational terms to enable them to play an appropriate role in strengthening international statistical coordination. A draft of tasks to be included in the mandate was considered. A range of views was expressed during the session and in subsequent consultations conducted by the Chairman. Additional consultations are planned in order to further develop the draft for possible consideration by the Commission at its special session or by the Working Group at its seventeenth session.

19. To promote a better flow of information on coordination efforts, the Working Group considered it would be useful to bring the relevant parts of the report of the Working Group and the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities to the attention of the regional conferences of statisticians.

20. The Working Group also considered that Secretariat reports prepared both for it and for the Commission should be concise, focused on the issues concerned, action-oriented, and available well in advance of meetings; relevant background information should be issued in background documents. The details of identifying the documents in this way, the number and the content of the documents required to meet the needs of the Commission and responsibility for authorship, would continue to be taken up by the Working Group.

21. In terms of its own functioning to help the Commission, the Working Group considered that at its annual meetings in 1994 and 1995 it could address some current and evolving issues which might otherwise be addressed by the Commission, and so provide more timely direction to the work of international organizations, giving the Commission additional time to consider other major issues. This process would also allow the Working Group to highlight and synthesize emerging issues for discussion and decision by the Commission. The Working Group could also (a) consider inter-agency activities more closely than had been possible while meeting every second year and (b) monitor the implementation of the Commission's decisions.

IV. OTHER ASPECTS OF THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATIONS AND DECISIONS ON STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL COOPERATION

22. The Working Group considered the matter on the basis of a note by the Secretary-General describing progress in seven major areas identified by the Statistical Commission in support of strengthening international statistical cooperation (E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.5): (a) integrated reporting on the statistical programmes and plans of international organizations; (b) enhancing the regional dimension in international statistical work; (c) updating elements of the Directory of International Statistics and revising the classification of statistical subject areas; (d) efforts to strengthen the role of UNSTAT in servicing the purposes and work of the Commission and place more emphasis on coordination matters; (e) newly emerging arrangements among the international

organizations; (f) a system for monitoring adherence in countries to adopted United Nations classifications; and (g) coordination of the statistical data-collection activities of international organizations. The Working Group also had before it the reports of the task forces (see para. 9 above) and a summary of the results of the twenty-seventh session of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities.

23. The Working Group noted the work being done in the European region on an integrated presentation of work plans by ECE, OECD and EUROSTAT. The Working Group restated its view that descriptive integrated programmes on (a) data collection, processing and dissemination, (b) methodological development and (c) technical cooperation, were essential tools for overall coordination of statistical activities. It noted that the task forces were addressing various aspects of these issues (see paras. 9-17 above).

24. Recognizing that a comprehensive plan on methodological development in all areas was a very large undertaking, the Working Group decided that a more limited step should be taken in the first instance, and requested the task forces to assemble information relating to plans in methodological development in their areas and in related areas as well, requested the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities to assemble and review these plans in order to identify gaps and overlaps, and to report to the Statistical Commission, in a forward-looking way, on the issues involved in the coordination of those activities, including time-frames, interrelationships among various areas of work by subject and over time, and views on priorities. It also noted that information on the overall plans and activities of organizations would be available to the Commission as part of the Commission's documentation (see paras. 63 and 64 below).

V. FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS

25. The Working Group considered the matter on the basis of (a) a note by the Secretary-General (E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.7) containing the results of consultations carried out by the regional commissions, with the countries of their respective regions, on countries' opinions concerning the possible application and usefulness at the regional and global levels of the fundamental principles of official statistics adopted by the Economic Commission for Europe in decision C (47) and (b) an oral report made by J. L. Bodin, who had been involved in the development of that decision and who had been invited by the Chairman to assist the Working Group in its consideration of the matter.

26. The Working Group welcomed the extensive and thoughtful responses of countries to the consultations. It considered that the replies, together with the support for the principles expressed by the Conference of European Statisticians, represented a consensus in support of the principles and their universal significance. Several replies suggested specific changes to some of the principles. Others suggested additional principles. The Working Group noted the suggestions made. It stressed that the wording of the existing principles had already been adopted by a regional body (ECE/Conference of European Statisticians). It also considered that many of the suggested changes to the principles related to the legal basis for the implementation of statistical activities in a country and to practical recommendations for the organization of statistical services. Others dealt with the short-term

application of the principles rather than their longer-term goals. The Working Group considered that the suggested changes, while affecting detail, were not essential to the principles, which were quite broad. Consequently the Working Group concluded that no changes were called for in the principles themselves but decided to amend the preamble to eliminate the particular regional orientation of ECE decision C (47) and to reflect the desired global concerns (see annex II for the amended preamble).

27. The Working Group considered at length whether to involve the regional conferences of statisticians further in the process or to proceed directly with a recommendation to the Statistical Commission. Given the extensive and broad-based support already expressed by countries in all regions, and the possibility that each regional commission might wish to amend the principles in different detailed ways, without altering the essence, the Working Group decided to proceed directly with a recommendation to the Commission. The Working Group decided (a) to request the Statistical Commission at its special session in 1994 to note the Working Group's consideration of the matter and (b) to advise the Statistical Commission to consider the adoption of the statement of fundamental principles of official statistics, incorporating the amended preamble.

28. The Working Group decided that the Commission should have before it the note by the Secretary-General on the subject (E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.7), so that the Commission could be informed of the views expressed by countries. The Working Group requested UNSTAT to inform the regional commissions of the Working Group's discussions and decision on the fundamental principles so that they might determine their own course of action. The Working Group approved the outline of a letter to the regional commissions concerning the fundamental principles and requested UNSTAT to forward it to the regional commissions. The Working Group agreed that discussion of the established fundamental principles in regional forums would be useful for improving understanding of the principles and for promoting their implementation.

29. The Working Group also considered the possibility of the Commission recommending to the Economic and Social Council the adoption of a draft resolution containing the statement of fundamental principles of official statistics, but decided that that issue would best be taken up by the Commission itself at an appropriate time.

VI. COORDINATION OF THE STATISTICAL DATA-COLLECTION ACTIVITIES OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

30. The Working Group considered the matter on the basis of a note by the Secretary-General on the inventory of statistical data-collection activities (E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.6 and Add.1) and a summary of the results of the twenty-seventh session of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities.

31. The Working Group welcomed the inventory, which had been restructured according to statistical subject-matter, making it more useful for coordination purposes. It considered that the use of the inventory and the other instruments of coordination (E/CN.3/1994/4, paras. 29-35) should contribute in the long run to improving the quality and consistency of data at the international level, in addition to serving the purposes set out in paragraph 2 of the Secretary-General's note, namely "to identify duplication and overlap in requests by

international and regional organizations for data from countries and to assist national statistical offices and other national statistical agencies in obtaining an overview of the nature and timing of statistical reports expected by international and regional organizations". The Working Group noted that countries were using the inventory to obtain an overview of what is collected by international organizations, identify duplication and coordinate national responses to questionnaires; international organizations were using it as a basis for general information on data-collection activities and potential duplication and to promote the sharing of data among organizations. The Working Group requested the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities, as far as possible, to use the inventory to specifically identify and eliminate areas of duplication in data collection.

32. The Working Group requested that the inventory be sent to national statistical offices, with the request, as in the past, that they indicate the specific uses that they make of it. It was considered important to reconfirm that the inventory served specific purposes, as well as general informational purposes, since considerable resources were applied to its production by all contributing organizations.

33. The Working Group requested that in the next edition of the inventory efforts should be made to describe the data-collection activities in a more uniform way and to more completely describe the output to which the collected data contributed.

34. The Working Group repeated its request, made at previous sessions, that, as far as possible, agencies should send national statistical offices copies of the questionnaires that agencies send direct to national ministries. Thus, national statistical offices would have a better knowledge of what is requested from a country overall and would be able to promote the quality and consistency of the data supplied.

VII. THE MEDIUM-TERM PLAN IN STATISTICS OF THE STATISTICAL DIVISION OF THE UNITED NATIONS SECRETARIAT

35. The Working Group took note of possible changes in programme planning arrangements in the United Nations that would affect the presentation of plans in statistical work. Such changes included the possibility of continuing with a fixed-period plan, revised every two years, or of adopting a rolling plan whose duration would be extended by two years every two years (see A/48/277, para. 28).

VIII. PROVISIONAL AGENDA AND DOCUMENTATION FOR THE 1994 AND 1995 SESSIONS OF THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION

36. The Working Group considered the matter on the basis of notes by the Secretary-General containing proposals on the provisional agendas and documentation for the Commission's special session and twenty-eighth session (E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.2 and Add.1, R.3 and supplementary note and Add.1).

A. Special session in 1994

1. General

37. With regard to the special session in 1994, the Working Group:

(a) Noted the proposed dates of 11 to 15 April 1994, in New York, their possible conflict with other scheduled meetings, and the limitations on changing the dates due to previously scheduled meetings in New York;

(b) Endorsed the provisional agenda set out in document E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.2, on the understanding that any overlap between items 3 (Strengthening international statistical cooperation) and 7 (Coordination and integration of international statistical programmes) would be eliminated and that all the documents would be listed under the appropriate agenda items;

(c) Confirmed the need for the five-day special session, as originally envisaged by the Statistical Commission, due to the number and importance of the items included in the agenda.

2. Documentation

38. The Working Group approved the outlines of and descriptive notes on the documents for each agenda item set out in the note by the Secretary-General (E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.2 and Add.1) and made a number of additions, changes and comments, which are set out in paragraphs 39-44 below. The Working Group noted that documents would need to be prepared by the end of December 1993, which could limit the extent to which its comments could be reflected in them.

Agenda item 3. Strengthening international statistical cooperation

39. The Working Group requested the Secretariat to (a) take into account in the proposed report the new coordination arrangements and developments in several of the regions and the efforts of the regional commissions to establish or reinforce conferences of national chief statisticians; (b) include the report of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities on its twenty-seventh session; (c) include reports of the task forces established by the Working Group (see para. 11 above); and (d) include the report on the coordination of statistical data collection from countries, which had been listed under agenda item 7 (Coordination and integration of international statistical programmes).

Agenda item 4. Implementation of the revised System of National Accounts (1993 SNA)

40. The Working Group noted that the Commission would have before it a report of ISWGNA as convener of the Task Force on National Accounts and requested that the report (a) address strategies for implementation including general strategies and problems foreseen and, as far as possible, begin to address national strategies in countries at different levels of statistical development; (b) reflect the research agenda as set out in The System of National Accounts, 1993; 3/ and (c) address the future data requirements to be met through the SNA questionnaire. The Working Group requested that the report include appropriate regional input.

Agenda item 5. Technical cooperation in statistics

41. The Working Group agreed that the report should address the development of mechanisms to ensure that information on the flow of technical cooperation resources was available for coordination purposes, and that section I (c) should be broadened to cover issues relating to technical cooperation for new and urgent areas of statistics.

Agenda item 6. Fundamental principles of official statistics

42. For the Working Group's consideration of item 6, see paragraphs 25-29 above.

Agenda item 7. Coordination and integration of international statistical programmes

43. In addition to coordination questions, the work in this area should address questions of the consistency and comparability of data collected and assess the extent to which the data collected are needed, relevant and used (see paras. 39 above and 44 below).

3. Suggested new item

44. The view was expressed that the statistics needed by the analytical and policy-oriented units of secretariats of international organizations and the statistics produced by those organizations themselves were often not sufficiently in harmony. This involved the basic relationship between users and producers of international statistics. The question was raised whether the Statistical Commission would wish to consider the matter. The Working Group noted the widely varying needs and orientations of international organizations and their efforts to achieve economy and efficiency in data collection. The Working Group requested Statistics Canada to work with the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities to further develop the issue for initial discussion at the 1994 session of the Working Group and possible discussion at a future session of the Commission.

B. Twenty-eighth session

1. Agenda

45. The Working Group endorsed the provisional agenda for the twenty-eighth session, in 1995, as approved by the Economic and Social Council in its decision 1993/222, with the following changes:

(a) It integrated the listed special topics into appropriate agenda items (see E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.3, paras. 6-10), as far as possible, instead of selecting one special topic for discussion;

(b) It agreed that the fiftieth anniversary of international statistical work in the United Nations system, in 1995, should be observed and that the matter should be taken into account in the agenda; the celebration should be forward-looking; the Working Group requested UNSTAT and the International

Statistical Institute (ISI) to consult together and coordinate this event with the symposium that ISI is planning on the subject;

(c) It decided to include under agenda item 4 (Strengthening international statistical cooperation), related substantive parts of agenda item 18 (Coordination and integration of international statistical programmes);

(d) It decided to include under agenda items 6 (Service statistics) and 7 (Industrial statistics) relevant elements of item 9 (International economic classifications);

(e) It decided to include under item 10 (Monitoring adherence to adopted United Nations classifications) the special topic entitled "Advantages and disadvantages of more flexible standards (classifications and other elements), concentrating in the first instance on classifications for economic activities and commodities" (E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.3, para. 6 (c));

(f) It combined agenda items 12 (Development indicators) and 15 (Statistical activities related to the World Summit for Social Development) and elements of the special topic entitled "Statistical implications of the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade" (E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.3, para. 6 (d)), the new item to be entitled "Measuring and monitoring economic and social development";

(g) It decided to include under item 14 (Technical cooperation in statistics) the special topic entitled "Statistical education and training" (E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.3, para. 6 (a)).

2. Documentation

46. The Working Group approved the outlines of and descriptive notes on the documents for each agenda item contained in the note by the Secretary-General (E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.3 and supplementary note and Add.1) and provided orally, with a number of additions, changes and comments (see paras. 49-64 below). It requested authors to prepare concise, issue-oriented documents and invited the preparation of background documents to provide detailed information. The Working Group strongly supported collaborative efforts by organizations to prepare documents. Experience of this at the twenty-seventh session of the Commission had been positive. The process promoted collaboration and identification of issues and in many cases resolution of issues. Preparation of documents by the task forces for the special session and the twenty-eighth session was strongly supported in this light.

47. The Working Group requested that documents be distributed by e-mail, as far as possible, in addition to the regular distribution of printed material.

48. The Working Group endorsed the Statistical Commission's request that the relevant parts of the overall review of the statistical work of international organizations, the report on plans of international organizations in statistics, the report containing updated information on the work of UNSTAT and the draft work programme of UNSTAT should be specifically identified for each of the substantive items on the agenda. The Working Group requested that the reports of the task forces include points for discussion, where appropriate. It decided

to continue the practice of identifying items (or sub-items) or documents for information or discussion and made decisions which have been taken into account in the items below.

Agenda item 4. Strengthening international statistical cooperation

49. The Working Group decided to include (a) the progress reports of the eight task forces; (b) the report of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities on its twenty-eighth session; (c) the report of the Working Group on its seventeenth session; and (d) the report on plans in methodological development (see para. 24 above), all of which would also be included under other relevant agenda items; and (e) the report on the coordination of statistical data collection from countries, which had been included under item 18.

Agenda item 5. National accounts

50. The Working Group requested that there be one discussion document, prepared by ISWGNA as convener of the Task Force on National Accounts covering (a) conceptual issues and (b) implementation problems, experiences and issues. It noted that information documents might be prepared by one or more members of ISWGNA.

Agenda item 6. Service statistics

51. In addition to the report proposed in document E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.3, the Working Group decided (a) to include the report of the Task Force on Service Statistics, recognizing that the subject had not been fully covered; (b) to consider the relevant parts of the report on the development of classifications and implementation of the International Standard Industrial Classification of all Economic Activities, third revision (ISIC, Rev.3), which had been listed under item 9 (International economic classifications); (c) to request the Secretariat to ask the Voorburg Group, on behalf of the Working Group, to provide a report on a suitable substantive topic; (d) to request UNSTAT, in the event that the Task Force on Service Statistics did not become operational, to explore with other organizations the feasibility of preparing an issue-oriented paper on the subject.

Agenda item 7. Industrial statistics

52. The Working Group decided (a) that the report of the Task Force on Industrial Statistics would be the discussion document for this item and that it would incorporate the relevant parts of the report on industrial statistics outlined in document E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.3; and (b) to consider the relevant parts of the report on the development of classifications and implementation of ISIC, Rev.3, which had been listed under item 9 (International economic classifications).

Agenda item 8. Price statistics

53. The Working Group decided that the report of the Task Force on Price Statistics, including the International Comparison Programme (ICP), would be the basic discussion document for this item and that it should, inter alia, address (a) implications of the increasing number of countries wanting to participate in ICP and the expanded workload of international organizations, (b) the need to

strengthen price statistics in those countries joining ICP and (c) general aspects of price statistics.

Agenda item 9. International economic classifications

54. The Working Group (a) decided that the parts of the report on the development of classifications and implementation of ISIC, Rev.3, related to service statistics would be considered under agenda item 6 and the parts related to industrial statistics under item 7 (see paras. 51 and 52 above) and (b) approved the outlines and notes for the other three documents proposed in document E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.3.

Agenda item 10. Monitoring adherence to adopted United Nations classifications

55. The Working Group requested the secretariat to prepare the report in two parts: the first comprising the document proposed in the supplementary note to document E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.3, with section III to be entitled "Inventory of international classifications"; and the second discussing the advantages and disadvantages of more flexible standards (classifications and other elements), concentrating in the first instance on classifications for economic activities and commodities (E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.3, para. 6 (c)). It was noted that the inventory itself would not be part of the documentation.

Agenda item 11. Demographic and social statistics

56. The Working Group agreed with the Secretariat proposals on this item (see E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.3, para. 4 (d) and (e)).

Agenda item 12. Development indicators

57. For the Working Group's consideration of the documentation for item 12, see paragraphs 45 (f) above and 60 below.

Agenda item 13. Environment statistics

58. The Working Group decided that the report of the Task Force on Environment Statistics would replace the proposed report (see E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.3) and that, in principle, the Task Force report would include the information that would have been provided in that report. The Working Group noted that one or more members of the task force might also prepare information documents.

Agenda item 14. Technical cooperation in statistics

59. The Working Group requested the inclusion of a new section describing the concrete action taken in the coordination of bilateral and multilateral technical cooperation in Africa, Latin America, the transition countries of eastern and central Europe and the countries of the former Soviet Union, as well as in other regions. It also included under this item the report of Statistics Canada on the proposed special topic, statistical education and training (see E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.3, paras. 6 (a) and 7).

Agenda item 15. Statistical activities related to the World Summit for Social Development

60. The Working Group changed the title of item 15 to "Measuring and monitoring economic and social development". It decided that the report of the Task Force on the Measurement of Poverty would be the basic discussion document and the proposed report of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean would also be a discussion document. The Working Group requested UNSTAT to request the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to prepare, also for discussion, a document on the measurement of human development. The report on the programme to monitor the achievement of social goals, requested under this item in document E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.3, and any document that UNRISD might prepare, would be for information. The Working Group expressed concern that the proposed documentation did not fully cover the measuring and monitoring aspects of the item, including aspects of the special topic on the statistical implications of the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade (see E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.3, para. 6 (d)) and requested UNSTAT to try to prepare such a document itself or in cooperation with other organizations or countries.

Agenda item 16. Fundamental principles of official statistics

61. The Working Group decided that this item should be retained on the agenda, pending the outcome of the Commission's consideration of the question at its special session in 1994 (see paras. 25-29 above).

Agenda item 17. Technological development and databases

62. The issue of mutual access to databases of international organizations was raised and the Working Group decided that it should be covered in the report on the coordination of statistical data collection from countries listed under agenda item 4 (Strengthening international statistical cooperation).

Agenda item 18. Coordination and integration of international statistical programmes

63. The Working Group decided to consider the first two documents proposed for this item (see E/CN.3/AC.1/1993/R.3) - report of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination on its seventeenth session and the report on the coordination of statistical data collection from countries - under item 4 (Strengthening international statistical cooperation) and the third and fourth documents - overall review of the statistical work of international organizations and the report on plans of international organizations in statistics - under item 19 (Programme questions).

Agenda item 19. Programme questions

64. The Working Group changed the title of the item to "Programme questions and related matters", and added two of the documents originally listed under item 18 (see para. 63 above).

3. Other issues

65. The Working Group decided that finance statistics and international trade statistics should be included in the agenda, report to be provided by the respective task forces.

66. The Working Group decided that at its seventeenth session it would continue to review the agenda for the Commission's twenty-eighth session.

67. The Working Group considered that it would be desirable for the Commission to meet for five days in 1995 but recognized that, given the agenda and documentation, that might not be possible. It considered that a different approach could be taken in drafting the Commission's report, making it briefer, more decision-oriented and less descriptive. The cooperation of participants in avoiding lengthy statements of national or international activities would be required. The Commission would decide on the matter at its special session, in 1994. UNSTAT was requested to provide the Commission with alternative timetables, indicating the amount of time to be spent on each item and on introductory statements.

IX. OTHER BUSINESS

68. The Working Group reviewed all the recommendations and decisions of the Statistical Commission at its twenty-seventh session on strengthening international statistical cooperation 4/ and concluded that at its present session it had reviewed progress in all the relevant areas (see paras. 4-24, 30-34 and 65-67 above).

69. The Working Group noted that special attention needed to be given to the translation of documents and publications on statistical questions from English into other languages to ensure that the meaning of technical words was correctly conveyed.

X. DATES, VENUE AND AGENDA OF THE SEVENTEENTH SESSION

70. The Working Group considered that communication between the Secretariat and the Working Group could be improved by rotating its meetings between Geneva and New York. It recommended that its seventeenth session be held in New York in early September 1994. The Working Group approved the following provisional agenda for its seventeenth session:

1. Implementation and other follow-up of the 1993 SNA.

2. Strengthening international statistical cooperation:

   (a) Work of the inter-agency task forces;

   (b) Strengthening the role of the regional commissions in statistics;

   (c) Other aspects.

3. Provisional agenda and documentation for the twenty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission.

4. Monitoring the implementation of decisions of the Statistical Commission.

5. Statistical support for policy analysis issues at the international level.

6. Other matters.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1993, Supplement No. 6 (E/1993/26), para. 209 (a).

2/ Ibid., para. 40.

3/ To be issued.

4/ Ibid., paras. 5-49.

Annex I

AGENDA OF THE SIXTEENTH SESSION

1. Election of officers.

2. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.

3. Implementation of the 1993 System of National Accounts (1993 SNA) and plans for further essential research.

4. Strengthening international statistical cooperation:

   (a) Work of the inter-agency task forces established by the Working Group;

   (b) Methods of work of the Statistical Commission and its Working Group;

   (c) Other aspects of the Statistical Commission's recommendations and decisions on strengthening international statistical cooperation.

5. Provisional agenda and documentation for the 1994 and 1995 sessions of the Statistical Commission.

6. Fundamental principles of official statistics.

7. Coordination of the statistical data-collection activities of international organizations.

8. The medium-term plan in statistics of the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat.

9. Dates and place of the seventeenth session of the Working Group.

10. Other business.

11. Report of the Working Group on its sixteenth session.

Annex II

PREAMBLE TO THE STATEMENT OF FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS

(Approved by the Working Group at its sixteenth session)

The Statistical Commission,

Bearing in mind that official statistical information is an essential basis for sustainable development in the economic, demographic, social and environmental fields and for mutual knowledge and trade among the States and peoples of the world,

Bearing in mind that the essential trust of the public in official statistical information depends to a large extent on respect for the fundamental values and principles that are the basis of any democratic society which seeks to understand itself and to respect the rights of its members,

Bearing in mind that the quality of official statistics, and thus the quality of the information available to the Government, the economy and the public depends largely on the cooperation of citizens, enterprises and other respondents in providing appropriate and reliable data needed for necessary statistical compilations and on the cooperation between users and producers of statistics in order to meet users' needs,

Recalling the efforts of governmental and non-governmental organizations active in statistics to establish standards and concepts to allow comparisons among countries,

Recalling also the International Statistical Institute's Declaration of Professional Ethics,

Having expressed the opinion that resolution C (47), adopted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe on 15 April 1992, is of universal significance,

Adopts the present principles of official statistics:

...